

David's Harp But Not His Psalm

This passage, which is originally entitled “Wel Davids luit, niet Davids lied”, has been translated from: K. Schilder, *Om Woord en Kerk* (vol. 1).

...who sing idly to the sound of stringed instruments and invent for yourselves musical instruments like David... but are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph. -Amos 6:5-6

People who only have a song and not the lute, a psalm but not the harp, the content but not the form, pure thoughts but no pure sounds, are poor. They are also responsible for their poverty, for God's people can only be poor if they have refused the riches which God offers them.

Yet there is one thing that is poorer than poverty. That is *death*. Not only are they poor, but *dead* are those that have the lute but not the song, that have the harp but not the psalm, that have the form but not the content, that have pure sounds but not the pure thoughts. Those people are *dead*.

And so the children of Joseph were *poor*, in their ruin, when they, in exile, hung their harps on the willows by the rivers of Babylon. For they missed the harp, the harp of David. Yet the *song*, the psalm of David was born again... If I forget you, O Jerusalem!...

But the ones at ease in Zion, whom Amos addresses, were *dead*. They had not taken over the *entire* inheritance from David. They did take over the lute, the harp, the pure sound, the music, the art from David's inheritance; but they missed his song, his psalm, his sacred thought, his godliness. And then the result was terrible. The harp, the lyre, the music is never without content; they are always based upon *thoughts*. When David's *thoughts* had faded in the hearts of Israel's children, they could no longer pray like David, no longer confess like David, no longer plead for mercy like David, no longer glorify God also through song as David did. David's harp was preserved; the art remained; but instead of David's psalms, this generation idly sang songs; the sacred music gave way to dance

music, the instrument that David had invented fell into the hands of strange, profane souls and the “worldly” songs overpowered David’s sacred art. For David sings and prays and trembles about Israel’s sin and God’s justice. But these harpists and lute players do not trouble themselves over the ruin of Joseph and do not weep about the sin of Israel.

Then in every worldly tune that Amos’ contemporaries played, there was an accusation concerning the sin of those who had given up David’s harp because David’s thoughts had faded in their minds. Similarly, for us, worldly music is still always an accusation. O church, you have given up the music, the art, out of your own hands. You gave David’s harp a vacation because David’s thoughts were dormant in you.

And at the same time, Amos comes to us saying: every Davidic song seeks a beautiful form, a beautiful sound, also in worship- just as David sought. But if the form fascinates and captivates you, where is your *content*?

You, who search for a new form, or you, who stubbornly hold on to the old form, where are the *thoughts* of David in you? Where is your grief concerning Israel’s sin? Only he who knows David’s *thoughts* may reach out for his harp in order to do with the strings what is good in his eyes. Keep your *thoughts* pure and let your heart be like that of the man after God’s own heart; then your *song*, your *art-form* will come up *spontaneously* and will always remain as *fresh* as David’s. Reformation of the lyre begins with the conversion of the heart- to the God of David. Yet this too: even though you should leave David’s harp *unchanged* in its old form, but no longer think David’s thoughts, behold, then also you, who swear by David’s harp, have become a sounding brass and a clanging cymbal.